

people, and we had to have a policy to lower the crime rate.

In Washington, the primary debate then was whether we needed more prevention or tougher punishment and whether the Federal Government ought to just give speeches about it, because it was primarily a local problem, or give money and walk away. Well, I felt that on both counts, we should do both.

The first elected job I ever had was attorney general of my State. Before that, when I was a young lawyer, and even when I was a law student, I used to teach criminal law, criminal procedure, and constitutional law to law enforcement officials. I have always been interested in this, and I have always been convinced that we had to have the proper balance of punishment and prevention and that the police could never do it alone, not without the community, not without the people in the street and the neighborhoods, not without the parents and the kids, people who want the blessings of a normal, safe life in every neighborhood in this country.

And so we've been working to try to give you the tools to do both, to prevent more crime, to save more kids, to effectively punish those who violate the law. In 1993 we passed the Brady bill. The Congress passed it; it had previously passed, but it had been vetoed by the previous President. I signed it and said I wanted to sign it, and I believed in it. And I heard all that talk about how terrible it was going to be and what an awful burden it is. And now we have almost half a million felons, fugitives, and stalkers who have not been able to get handguns because of the Brady bill, and not a single hunter in America who's been inconvenienced. It was the right thing to do. There are more citizens alive; there are more police officers alive today because the Brady law is in effect.

In 1994 the crime bill provided funds for 100,000 police officers over a 6-year period. Thanks to the leadership of the Attorney General and those working with her, we distributed those funds and got those folks hired, under budget and ahead of schedule. We passed the assault weapons ban, cracked down on illegal gun dealing to young people, kept an eye out also for the most innovative local crime-fighting strategies like Operation Cease Fire here in Boston.

Now, the things you have done and the things we've tried to help you do have transformed

life in America. As the Attorney General said, the crime rate's dropped now for 7 years in a row. The overall crime rate's at its lowest level in 25 years. The murder rate is the lowest level nationwide in 31 years; gun crime down 35 percent; juveniles committing homicides with guns down 57 percent; gun prosecutions up at all levels of government, local, State, and Federal. Federal firearms prosecutions are higher today than they were in 1992, but they're up 25 percent just since 1998 to 1999; those convicted of Federal gun crimes serving longer sentences. We are trying to send a message, an unambiguous message, to people who violate the law: If you commit crimes with guns or violate gun laws, you will pay a heavy price.

No city has sent that message more clearly than Boston. But your message is more than that. You have made us know that this is not just a numbers game. You have shown that to reduce crime most and therefore to increase freedom most among your families, your children, and your neighborhoods, prosecutions must be targeted where they'll have the greatest impact—in Boston's case, on violent repeat offenders and on gun traffickers who supply them.

You have also shown that there needs to be a team effort, partnerships with citizens and leaders in every community, focused on saving kids and preventing crime before it occurs. And so after all these years of effort and the leadership of your great mayor and others, you have made Boston one of the safest cities in America. It is essential to making America what we want it to be in the 21st century.

You know, yesterday we celebrated the annual holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday. And I was honored to sign the bill that made it not only a national holiday but a national day of service. We call it a day on, not a day off. Yesterday, in keeping with my tradition, I went to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Washington, DC, with a group of citizens called Greater DC Cares and some young AmeriCorps volunteers, and we worked on rehabbing a facility. But in preparation for that day, I thought about all the other King holidays we've had since I've been President and an astonishing opportunity I had back in 1993 to speak in the Mason Temple Church of God in Christ in Memphis, Tennessee. That's where Dr. King spoke the night before he was killed.

We had all the leaders of that great church in America there, at a time when America was